

Harlem

Langstone Huges

Langstone Hughes is popularly known as the poet laureate of the Harlem Renaissance. The poem 'Harlem' is a poetic outcry against the racial injustice meted out to the Negroes in America. Harlem is a famous area of New York City having the country's largest African-American population since the World War I. In the 1920s, Harlem became a hub of poets, artists and intellectuals.

The short poem 'Harlem' is included in the volume 'Montage of a Dream Deferred'. It was published in 1951 and it voices the dreams of the American Africans in Harlem after World War II. The dreams were either deferred or lost during the time. Langstone Hughes was deeply pained by this reality.

The poem opens by asking what happens when a long-cherished dream is put off indefinitely. The opening question leads to more questions that are couched in very strong but dismal phrases. The poet asks if the dream dries up like a raisin in the sun or fester like a sore, and then run. He also compares the deferred dream to a piece of stinking rotten meat and a syrupy sweet that becomes hard and crusty over time.

The final lines of the poem become prophetic. The poet asks if such a dream may just sag on like a heavy load or explode into a violent action. The continuous racial discrimination led a bitter Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s.

To conclude, 'Harlem' is one of most engaging poems on the theme of racial discrimination in America. The images of waste and decay in the poem aptly paint the awful conditions of the Black Americans.